

The JUDGE's Corner

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Our welcome home to Cleveland wasn't exactly what I had anticipated. I don't think I'll be spending much time in the garden/swamp this month! The good news is that we spent a week in California taking care of our grandchildren there. You may recognize their names (Dalton, Bryce, and Paige). We took advantage of the opportunity to get their dahlias started for the Junior Section at the annual show near there in August. If you haven't been to a National Show, this one in San Francisco should be a great one to attend.



*Paige getting ready to plant
Princess Paige in her dad's
very dry garden*

I have had one judge's test back and understand that there are others that are in the works. Great, thanks. Please don't overly agonize about some of the questions. Jerry discovered a couple typos and a couple ambiguous questions and, of course, the new numbering system obviates some portions of the test. Please just do your best to complete the questions and get the test back to me at the upcoming meeting or by email, if possible. I think that it will be appropriate to hold a judges' session to discuss the test and the answers to the test before one of our meetings. Please let me know if you feel that would be useful for you.

You will find that the judging test will require you to glean detailed information from the *Guide to Judging Dahlias*, the *Classification and Handbook of Dahlias*, and the judging *Score Cards*. Inasmuch as you should review those documents each year, the judging test will help make sure that happens. Of course, "book learning" didn't do much to help you pass the driving portion of your driver's test, did it! In judging dahlias, the knowledge gathered from those resource materials must be supplemented by a lot of hands-on judging experience both in shows and in the trial gardens. My records show that we're in pretty good shape in that regard. The tests and judging seminars may be the key elements lacking in some of your lists of requirements.

One very important piece of the knowledge that comes with judging experience is a sense of the severity of a fault. Consider the singles below. It doesn't take much experience to be able to differentiate between these two entries in the color category. The wolf petal at 5 o'clock in the left bloom leaps out at you and the penalty would be most of the 22 color points. However, you would virtually never see a bloom like the one on the left in a show (except to make a point) or in a Trial garden. Now, take a closer look at the bloom on the right. Does it deserve a passing score? The answer is, of course, yes. The red is bright and clean and pretty uniform. The yellow eye zone is bright and an attractive contrast to the red. Is the color perfect? The answer is, of course, no! Look, for example, at the difference in the size



Above are the worst and the best of the open-centered seedlings at the Petitti Show two seasons ago. (Pretty easy to tell which is which, eh?) The worst went to the compost pile; the best went on to win the best S at the National Show last year.

of the eye zones in the ray florets at 12 and 6 o'clock. In addition, the eye zone in the floret at 5 o'clock is not very well centered around the center of the bloom. The floret at 2 o'clock seems to show a little fading out near the tip. If we had three blooms similar to the one on the right in an ADS Seedling Bench Evaluation, what would an appropriate penalty for color be? I would say that the eye zone problems and the slight variation in red near the tips add up to a couple incidents of a subtle (or very subtle!) defect. That would translate to a color score of the order of 90%, or -2. Of course, in order to be able to properly analyze the color, you would want to be able to examine three actual blooms, not just a picture of a single bloom.